

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PAIRS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
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WHITE HOUSE WASHDC IMMEDIATE

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EXDIS

FOR THE SECRETARY AND SAUNDERS
AMMAN FOR ATHERTON
WHITE HOUSE FOR VICE PRESIDENT AND BRZEZINSKI

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IS
SUBJECT/ WHY THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT IS PROBABLY HERE TO STAY
FOR A WHILE

1. SUMMARY: DESPITE PREMATURE REPORTS OF ITS IMMINENT
DEMISE, AND A LOT OF WISHFUL THINKING, THE LIKUD
GOVERNMENT IS PROBABLY SET FOR A LONG
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LIFE, BARRING AN UNEXPECTEDLY
DRAMATIC DISPLAY OF FURTHER FLEXIBILITY BY SADAT OR
BEGIN'S DEATH OR INCAPACITATION. THE GOVERNMENT'S
FORTITUDE IS BASED ON THE INTENSE COMMITMENT OF THE
COALITION PARTNERS TO - ABOVE ALL ELSE - REMAIN IN
POWER. FOR THIS REASON, EACH OF THE PARTIES HAS LITTLE
TROUBLE IGNORING THE INTERNAL CONTRADICTIONS

THAT WOULD TEAR APART A COALITION BASED ON IDEOLOGICAL AFFINITIES, AS LONG AS ITS NARROW INTERESTS ARE SERVED. IN ADDITION, DESPITE THE DISAFFECTION OF LARGE AND INFLUENTIAL SEGMENTS OF THE MIDDLE CLASS OVER ITS HANDLING OF THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS, THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT REMAINS GENUINELY POPULAR WITH A PREDOMINENTLY HAWKISH ISRAELI PUBLIC, PARTICULARLY THE SEPHARDIC MAJORITY. END SUMMARY.

2. THE LIKUD GOVERNMENT HAS IN RECENT MONTHS APPEARED TO BE MOVING IN THE DIRECTION OF AN EARLY DEMISE. HOWEVER, A BROAD SURVEY OF BOTH COALITION MK'S AND OPPOSITION MEMBERS, AS WELL AS EMBASSY JOURNALISTIC CONTACTS, INDICATES THAT THIS IMPRESSION IS FAULTY. THE BEGIN CABINET IS, IN FACT, ALIVE AND WELL. IT MAY NOT BE FUNCTIONING AS AN EFFICIENT POLICY-MAKING INSTRUMENT, AND IT MAY BE RENT BY PERSONAL RIVALRIES, POWER CONFLICTS (AMONG BOTH INDIVIDUALS AND PARTIES - WITNESS HURWITZ'S RESIGNATION YESTERDAY) AND - IN THE CASE OF WEIZMAN - PROFOUND DIFFERENCES OVER FOREIGN POLICY. HOWEVER, AS A MECHANISM FOR SUSTAINING A NUMERICAL MAJORITY IN THE KNESSET, THEREBY ASSURING ITSELF OF CONTINUED LIFE, THIS CABINET IS STRONG AND ITS LIFE EXPECTANCY LENGTHY.

3. THE WIDESPREAD AND ERRONEOUS IMPRESSION OF A CABINET ON THE VERGE OF DISSOLUTION CAN PROBABLY BE EXPLAINED BY CONFIDENTIAL

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THE PERSISTING TENDENCY TO MEASURE CABINET STRENGTH ACCORDING TO CRITERIA DEVELOPED DURING 29 YEARS OF LABOR RULE. THE SOLIDITY OF LABOR GOVERNMENTS WAS BASED ON A BROAD UNIFORMITY OF OUTLOOK, A COMMON COMMITMENT TO BASIC PRINCIPLES AND A UNIQUE DISCIPLINE AND CAMARADERIE WHICH WAS THE PRODUCT OF INTENSELY SHARED HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE. CEMENTING THESE ALREADY FORMIDABLE TIES WAS THE POWERFUL LEADERSHIP OF A STRONG CENTRAL PERSONALITY, FIRST THAT OF DAVID BEN-FURION, AND LATER GOLDA MEIR. THE DECLINING YEARS OF LABOR RULE WERE MARKED BY AN EROSION OF THESE TWIN FOUNDATIONS OF THE PARTY'S -- AND GOVERNMENT'S -- STRENGTH. A SIGNIFICANT PERCENTAGE OF THE ELECTORATE ABANDONED A PARTY SEEMINGLY LACKING BOTH A CORE AND FIRM LEADERSHIP.

4. THE LIKUD GOVERNMENT DERIVES ITS STRENGTH FROM WHOLLY DIFFERENT SOURCES. NO MORE THAN THE RABIN GOVERNMENT IS IT AN EXPRESSION OF CLEAR AND CONSISTENT POLICY DERIVING FROM A FIRM IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION. JUDGED ON THIS BASIS, THE LIKUD CABINET IS INDEED A PATCHWORK OF CONFLICTING OUTLOOKS AND INTERESTS HELD TOGETHER BY BEGIN'S CHARISMATIC AUTHORITY. HENCE RECENT WIDESPREAD EXPECTATION HERE AND

ABROAD THAT THE CABINET'S INTERNAL CONTRADICTIONS, SET AGAINST THE PRIME MINISTER'S REDUCED LEVEL OF FUNCTIONING, WOULD LEAD TO ITS EARLY DISSOLUTION.

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FOR THE SECRETARY AND SAUNDERS
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5. BUT IT HAS NOT, AND EVEN LABOR DIEHARDS ARE NOW PREPARED TO RECOGNIZE THE REASON FOR THIS GOVERNMENT'S RESILIENCY: THE RAISON D'ETRE OF EACH OF THE CABINET'S CONSTITUENT PARTIES, AND THE GOVERNMENT ITSELF, IS SIMPLY TO REMAIN IN POWER. THE LIKUD AND ITS COALITION PARTNERS TO NOT SHARE LABOR'S FASTIDIOUS NEED TO DISTINGUISH THE MEANS (POWER) FROM THE LEGITIMIZING END (THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CONSISTENT POLICY GOALS DERIVING FROM CLEARLY ARTICULATED IDEOLOGICAL TENETS). WITH THE EXCEPTION F A MAJORITY

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OF THE DMC, ALL THE COALITION COMPONENTS FULLY INTEND TO SEE THIS GOVERNMENT THROUGH ITS NATURAL TERM. THIS FACT ALONE MAKES LIKELY ITS CONTINUED SURVIVAL.

6. TAKING THE COALITION PARTNERS ONE AT A TIME: DESPITE OCCASIONAL RUMBLINGS AMONG THE LIBERALS, THE LIKUD IS SOLID BEHIND BEGIN WHEN IT COMES TIME TO BE COUNTED. AND IN THEIR LOYALTY TO BEGIN'S LEADERSHIP, THE NRP LEADERS ARE AS ONE WITH THE LIKUD. THE NRP IS NOW DOMINATED BY ITS YOUTH FACTION WHICH EARLY ON DECIDED THAT THE PARTY'S FUTURE WAS BEST SERVED BY AN ALLIANCE WITH THE LIKUD. THE YOUTH FACTION SHARES WITH HERUT THE SAME FOREIGN POLICY OUTLOOK AND IDEOLOGICAL COMMITMENT TO THE WEST BANK. THE PARTY AS A WHOLE BELIEVES ITS JOINING THE COALITION WAS WELL COMPENSATED BY BEING AWARDED THE LONG COVETED EDUCATION PORTFOLIO -- A PRIZE DENIED IT BY ALL LABOR GOVERNMENTS.

7. IN TERMS OF ITS NARROW GOALS, AGUDAT YISRAEL COULD FIND NO MORE COMFORTABLE GOVERNMENT THAN BEGIN'S. AY IS HELD IN TIGHT REIGN BY ITS COUNCIL OF TORAH SAGES AND HAS HINTED AT BOLTING THE GOVERNMENT IF ITS RELIGIOUS DEMANDS, CONTAINED IN THE COALITION AGREEMENT, ARE NOT HONORED. THE KNESSET'S ENACTMENT THIS WEEK OF ONE OF THESE DEMANDS, EASING MILITARY DRAFT EXEMPTION CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES FOR RELIGIOUS ORTHODOX GIRLS, INDICATES THERE IS LITTLE DANGER THIS THREAT WILL BE MADE GOOD. BEGIN INTERVENED DECISIVELY TO ENSURE PASSAGE.

8. ONLY THE DMC SHOWS SIGNS OF DEFECTIONS. HOWEVER, SHOULD THE DMC DISSIDENTS DECIDE TO CALL IT QUIT, THEY ARE NOT LIKELY TO TAKE MORE THAN SIX OR SEVEN OF THE 15 MK'S INTO OPPOSITION. THE OTHERS SEEM NO MORE DISPOSED TO LEAVE

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NOW THAN THEY WERE AT THE TIME OF THE PEAK OF THE LIKUD'S POPULARITY LAST FALL, AND THEIR REMAINING WITH LIKUD WOULD ASSURE THE CABINET OF THE CONTINUING COMFORTABLE MAJORITY.

9. BUT THE LIKUD CABINET CONTINUES TO BE MORE THAN A MERE EXPRESSION OF A NUMERICAL MAJORITY IN THE KNESSET. IT HAS ANOTHER BASIS OF SUPPORT: ITS SUSTAINED -- AND APPARENTLY SUSTAINABLE -- POPULARITY. MUCH OF THE ISRAELI PUBLIC IS CONSISTENTLY AND INTENSELY HAWKISH. SO LONG AS SECURITY REMAINS ISRAEL'S SINGLE NATIONAL FIXATION, AND IN THE ABSENCE OF A PUBLIC REPEAT PUBLIC AND SPECIFIC

REPEAT SPECIFIC DISPLAY OF FURTHER FLEXIBILITY BY SADAT, THIS GOVERNMENT'S HARD LINE CAN BE ASSURED OF STRONG POPULAR SUPPORT. FINALLY, THE CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP AND AUTHORITARIAN STYLE OF MENACHEM BEGIN CONTINUES TO HAVE STRONG APPEAL AMONG BROAD SEGMENTS OF THE ISRAELI POPULATION, PARTICULARLY AMONG THE MAJORITY ORIENTAL COMMUNITY.

10. IN SUM, EVEN DOCTRINAIRE SOCIALISTS AGREE THAT SO LONG AS MENACHEM BEGIN RETAINS HIS FACULTIES, THIS GOVERNMENT IS HERE TO STAY. THE LIKUD CABINET'S WILL TO SURVIVE IS INTACT, AND ONLY AN EXTERNAL SHOCK OF ENORMOUS MAGNITUDE OR BEGIN'S DEPARTURE FROM THE SCENE BY HEALTH OR INCAPACITATION COULD ALTER THIS DETERMINING FACT. THE GOVERNMENT'S POPULAR SUPPORT IS A SECONDARY CONSIDERATION, BUT IT IS ASSURED SO LONG AS PRIME MINISTER BEGIN IS SUFFICIENTLY FIT TO SUSTAIN HIS POWERFUL BOND WITH THE BROAD MASS OF THE ISRAELI ELECTORATE.

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